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**Heller, Cornyn, Rubio Introduce Bill Expanding Veterans’ Access to Mental Health Care**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**– U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV), along with Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Marco Rubio (R-FL), introduced the Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act, legislation that would expand veterans’ access to mental health care services to former service members who may not be eligible to receive health care benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Specifically, the legislation would require the VA to provide veterans who were released from the military with an “other-than-honorable” discharge a mental health assessment and treatment. Under current law, veterans who received an “other-than-honorable” discharge may not be eligible for mental health services from the VA unless the department has deemed otherwise.

A [joint investigation by NPR and Colorado Public Radio in 2015](https://www.npr.org/2015/10/28/451146230/missed-treatment-soldiers-with-mental-health-issues-dismissed-for-misconduct) revealed that the U.S. Army has separated an estimated 22,000 combat veterans diagnosed with mental health disabilities or traumatic brain injury for alleged misconduct since 2009.

“The men and women who fight to defend this country and protect our freedoms deserve the support that they need when they return home,” **said Heller**. “Our legislation would help ensure that veterans who are struggling and in need of metal health care services have access to the treatment that they require. I’m proud to work with Senator Cornyn on this legislation, and I urge my colleagues  to join us in recognizing the importance of taking care of our combat veterans, particularly those who are most in need.”

“Many of our military members return home with injuries both seen and unseen, and we must give them every opportunity to get the care they need,” **said Cornyn.** “Veterans who are struggling deserve to be carefully evaluated at the onset of mental illness and supported with the VA medical treatment necessary for their recovery.”

“We should be taking care of veterans who need mental health treatment, regardless of their discharge status. This bill would provide critical mental healthcare services to veterans who were discharged from military service under other-than-honorable conditions. It would also give veterans who may have been discharged due to mental illness a chance to have their case reviewed for needed VA benefits. I urge my Senate colleagues to deliver this relief and swiftly pass this legislation so we can get it to the president’s desk to be signed into law,” **said** **Rubio.**

The Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act also allows veterans to receive mental health treatment outside the VA health system if the Secretary deems treatment at the designated facility “clinically advisable” or too far from a veterans’ residence. Additionally, the bill requires the VA to establish a formal “character of service” process, in which the Secretary would review the veterans’ discharge or release.

Congressman Mike Coffman (R-CO) introduced the Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act, H.R. 918, in the U.S. House of Representatives. The U.S. House unanimously passed the bill in November 2017.

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